

The Raven

Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe is well known for short stories and poems about mysterious and frightening events. He also writes frequently about the sometimes terrifying power of the imagination. As you read this poem, try to separate what is really happening from what the speaker is imagining.

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak
and weary,

Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten
lore—

While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came
a tapping,

As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my
chamber door.

5 “Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my
chamber door—

Only this, and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost
upon the floor.

Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought
to borrow

10 From my books surcease¹ of sorrow—sorrow for the
lost Lenore—

For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels
name Lenore—

Nameless *here* for evermore.

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple
curtain

Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt
before;

15 So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood
repeating

“Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber
door—

Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber
door;—

This it is and nothing more.”

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then
no longer,

20 “Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness
I implore;

But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you
came rapping,

1. **surcease** (ser SEES) end.



Activate Prior Knowledge

You probably remember many childhood stories, especially fairy tales, beginning with the phrase “Once upon a time.” That phrase is usually a signal that the story will have imaginary characters and events—and a happy ending. Poe’s poem begins “Once upon a midnight dreary.” How does that phrase change what you expect?

Reading Strategy



This selection contains many long, complicated sentences. To help you understand the poem, **break each long sentence down** as you read. Start by looking for the core of the sentence. Find the subject and the predicate. For example, reread the bracketed sentence carefully. Circle the subject and the predicate. Rewrite the sentence in your own words on the lines below.

Literary Analysis

Poe believed that every character, detail, and incident in a story should achieve **a single effect**. Look again at the first sentence of this poem. What do you think is the single effect that Poe is trying to achieve in this sentence?

TAKE NOTES

Reading Check

What does the speaker find when he opens his door the first time?

Reading Strategy

Reread the underlined sentence.

Break this long sentence

down as you read. Look for the core of the sentence.

Then, rewrite the sentence in your own words.

Literary Analysis

Gothic writing influenced Poe greatly. Gothic novels usually take place in old, gloomy castles where frightening supernatural events happen. What gothic elements have you noticed so far in this poem?

Reading Check

What happens when the speaker opens his door a second time?

And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my
chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you"—here I opened
wide the door;—
Darkness there and nothing more.

- ²⁵ Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there
wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to
dream before;
But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave
no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered
word, "Lenore?"
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the
word, "Lenore!"
³⁰ Merely this and nothing more.

Back then into the chamber turning, all my soul
within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder
than before.

- "Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my
window lattice;
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery
explore—
³⁵ Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery
explore;—
'Tis the wind and nothing more!"

- Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a
flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days
of yore;
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute
stopped or stayed he;
⁴⁰ But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my
chamber door—
Perched upon a bust of Pallas² just above my
chamber door—
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling³ my sad fancy into
smiling,

Vocabulary Development: obeisance (oh BAY suhns) *n.* gesture
of respect

² **Pallas** (PAL us) Pallas Athena, the ancient Greek goddess of wisdom.

³ **beguiling** (bi GYL ing) charming.

By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance⁴
it wore,

45 “Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said,
“art sure no craven,

Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the
Nightly shore—

Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s
Plutonian⁵ shore!”

Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

Much I marveled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse
so plainly,

50 Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy
bore;

For we cannot help agreeing that no living human
being

Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his
chamber door—

Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his
chamber door,

With such name as “Nevermore.”

55 But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust,
spoke only

That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did
outpour.

Nothing farther than he uttered—not a feather then
he fluttered—

Till I scarcely more than muttered, “Other friends
have flown before—

On the morrow he will leave me, as my Hopes have
flown before.”

60 Then the bird said, “Nevermore.”

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly
spoken,

“Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock
and store

Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful
Disaster

Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one
burden bore—

65 Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden
bore

Of ‘Never—nevermore.’”

Vocabulary Development: **craven** (KRAY vuhn) *adj.* very
cowardly

4. **countenance** (KOWN tuh nuhns) *n.* facial expression.

5. **Plutonian** (plooh TOH nee uhn) *adj.* like the underworld or infernal regions.
Refers to Pluto, Greek and Roman god of the underworld.



Reading Check

The speaker asks the raven what his name is. What does the raven reply?

Literary Analysis

In **gothic** writing, frightening supernatural events often happen. What gothic elements have you noticed on this page of the poem?

Literary Analysis

With every character, detail, and incident in this poem, Poe tries to achieve **a single effect**. What is the single effect that Poe is trying to achieve in the bracketed section?

Stop to Reflect

Has anyone ever told you that your imagination was running away with you? The speaker of this poem is letting his imagination run away with him. What clues do you have that he is?

TAKE NOTES

Reading Strategy

Reread the underlined sentence. **Break down this long sentence** as you read. Circle the subject and the predicate. Then, rewrite the sentence in your own words on the lines below.



Literary Analysis

Reread the bracketed stanzas. The speaker is angry with the raven here. What is the **single effect** that Poe is trying to achieve in these stanzas?

Reading Check

The speaker asks the raven when he will forget Lenore. What does the raven reply?

But the Raven still beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,

Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird, and bust and door;

Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking

⁷⁰ Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous⁶ bird of yore—

What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore

Meant in croaking “Nevermore.”

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing

To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom’s core;

⁷⁵ This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining

On the cushion’s velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o’er,

But whose velvet-violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o’er,

She shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer

⁸⁰ Swung by seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.

“Wretch,” I cried, “thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee

Respite—respite and nepenthe⁷ from thy memories of Lenore;

Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!”

Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

⁸⁵ “Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—

Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,

Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—

On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—

Is there—is there balm in Gilead?⁸—tell me—tell me, I implore!”

⁹⁰

Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

6. **ominous** (AHM uh nuhs) *adj.* threatening; sinister.

7. **nepenthe** (ni PEN thee) *n.* drug that the ancient Greeks believed could relieve sorrow.

8. **balm in Gilead** (GIL ee uhd) in the Bible, a healing ointment made in Gilead, a region of ancient Palestine.

“Prophet!” said I, “thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!

By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore—

Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,⁹

It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—

⁹⁵ Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.”

Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

“Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!”

I shrieked, upstarting—

“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!

Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!

¹⁰⁰ Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!

Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!”

Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting

On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;

¹⁰⁵ And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming;

And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;

And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor

Shall be lifted—nevermore!

9. **Aidenn** (AY den) arabic for Eden or heaven.

Reader’s Response: Try reading the poem aloud or listening to a taped version. Notice the repeated words and sounds. What is your reaction to the sounds of this poem?

Thinking About the Skill: How did breaking long sentences down help you to understand this poem? How will this technique help you read other poems in the future?



Literary Analysis

The raven answers “Nevermore” to three different questions in the last three stanzas of this poem. What is the **single effect** that Poe is trying to achieve by repeating “Nevermore”?

Reading Strategy

The last stanza of this poem is one long sentence. **Break this long sentence down** into several shorter sentences as you read the stanza. Then, rewrite the sentence in your own words on the lines below.
